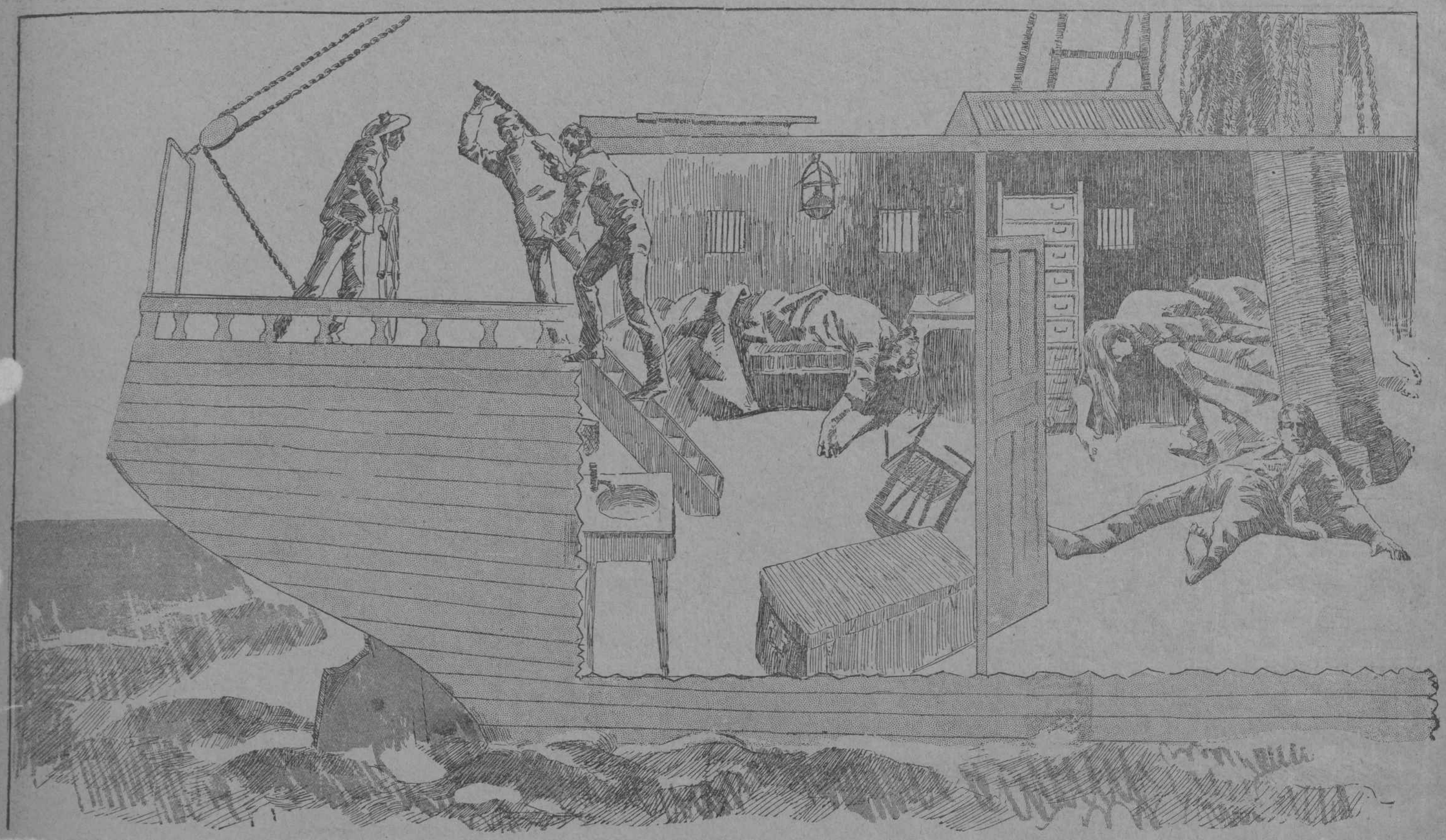
MOST EXTRAORDINARY SEA MYSTERY OF THE CENTURY—



"I was aroused by Mrs. Nash's scream, and when I reached the captain's room I found him lying on the floor. I went into Mrs. Nash's cabin and saw nothing but blood. Then I ran on

For the past two weeks a sensational murder trial has been in progress in the city of Boston. Thomas M. C. Bram, a sailor, whose life was at stake, was charged with one of the most remarkable crimes ever recorded in the annals of truth or fiction.

It is a tragedy of the sea so mysterious, so horrible and so utterly incomprehensible in its details, that the human brain can hardly grasp it as an actual event that occurred in the routine of so innocent and prosaic a life as that of the American coasting trade. In his wildest imaginings Edgar Allen Poe never devised a more ghastly plot. In their wildest fancies of the romantic possibilities of sea life neither Robert Louis Stevenson nor W. Clark Russell ever conceived a more thrilling or mysterious happening.

Here is a ship that sails out from a peaceful port in the middle of Summer with eleven souls on board. The captain's wife, a quiet New England woman, accompanies her husband and spends most of her time in knitting and reading. A young Harvard graduate whose health has failed is on board as a passenger in the hope that the sea voyage will strengthen his weakened vitality. The first mate, the second mate and the rest of the crew are commonplace beings of the type of the ordinary seaman that loiters about the water front of every port in the land.

The wind is light, the sun burns fiercely, and for ten days the little ship drifts lazily over a glassy sea. So intense is the heat that it is necessary to keep the decks moist in order to prevent their blistering and burning. Idly the craft glides out to the very middle of the Atlantic Ocean, with nothing save the solemn ringing of the ship's bell and the change of watches to relieve the humdrum of life on board.

Then, in the middle of the tenth night, without warning and without cause or reason, the captain and his wife and the second mate are brutally butchered in their cabins by an axe wielded by a maniac. In the middle of Summer this was, and a man has been on trial for the murder, yet no human being save the man who committed the deed can solve the mystery, and the true story of that night's happenings will probably never be told in this world.

The bodies were placed in a boat and towed behind the ship. The man who was supposed to be on duty at the wheel when the murders occurred was put in irons and tied to a mast. Several days afterward the first mate, who, according to the law of the sea, was in command of the ship after the captain's death, was likewise put in irons and tied to a mast.

After long deliberation out there in the middle of the ocean, the young student, the invalid passenger, took command of the vessel, and with the assistance of the crew sailed her into the port of Halifax, where she arrived flying a flag of distress and an emblem of black—the token of mutiny.

The crew were placed under arrest and transported to —Boston, whence the ship had hailed. The matter was carefully sifted by the authorities and, one by one, the prisoners were released, until only one remained—one against whom the evidence was heaviest. And this one was placed on trial for his life.

The trial went on for more than two weeks. Experts of every description did their best to throw light upon the darkness. The best lawyers in the State were secured for both sides. Neither the State nor the defence spared time or expense in upholding its side, and thousands and thousands of dollars were expended upon the case. Yet in the minds of many it is all as mysterious, as uncanny and as incomprehensible as it was upon that calm Sunday morning in midocean when the crew awoke to find that a tragedy had occurred while they slept.

I.

The Herbert Fuller, a barkentine 175 feet long and 30 feet wide—that will probably give you a better idea of her size than if you were to know her tonnage—sailed out of Boston harbor on the afternoon of July 3, this year, bound for Rosario, in the Argentine Republic. She was laden with spruce and hemlock lumber, and her cargo not only filled her hold, but was piled high on her deck from bow to stern, leaving only the open space necessary to work the ship.

Her captain, Charles I. Nash, a man of phlegmatic temperament, calm and unemotional, had taken his wife along on this trip—a custom quite common among sailors of Anglo-Saxon breed, but frowned upon by your French and Spanish and Italian mariner for various reasons. Mrs. Nash was, to all accounts, a young and good-looking woman, thoroughly self-possessed and conscious of the fact that her husband was captain of the ship. Her relations to her husband's officers were perfectly formal; the crew were beneath her notice.

Several days before the barkentine sailed a young graduate of Harvard University by name of Lester Hawthorne Monks applied to Captain Nash for passage to the Argentine Republic and thence to any port for which the Herbert Fuller should be fortunate enough to obtain a cargo.

The young man explained that his father was wealthy and that the trip was taken purely for the benefit of his health. Several days before sailing he brought his baggage on board and, in the Captain's absence, fell into conversation with the first mate, who then had charge of the ship. The first mate—Thomas Mead Chambers Bram was his name—set before the young man at great length the hardships of a voyage on a small sailing vessel and advised him candidly to take the trip on a steamer, saying:

"It will be just as beneficial and more comfortable for you."

Monks, however, had made up his mind to spend fifty or sixty days at sea and pooh-poohed the suggestion of hardships. His determination did not falter, and when the Herbert Fuller went out to sea Monks was a passenger on board. The Captain placed his cabin at the young man's disposal, reserving the chart room for his own use. Mrs. Nash had a cabin of her own.

Bram, the first mate, and two others were destined to play an important part in the voyage of the Herbert Fuller, and are therefore entitled to something more than brief mention in the beginning of the story. Thomas Bram was a native of St. Kitts. He was suspected by his mates of being a half-breed, or, at least, of having some admixture of negro blood in his veins. But this assertion he stoutly denied, and, as the slightest mention of it aroused all his fury, the suspicion was rarely referred to in his presence. He was thirty-three years old and had spent most of his life upon the sea. Further on you shall hear more of his past life, but for the present let this suffice: He was an able seaman and a man of wide experience and quick intelligence.

The cook of the Herbert Fuller was a young negro by the name of Jonathan Spencer. He was only twenty-two years old, but shrewd beyond his age. He was exceedingly popular with the crew, and possessed that wonderful faculty—although it lay dormant until circumstances aroused it—of commanding and controlling men. He had sailed with Captain Nash on previous voyages and was attached to him.

There were two others who must be mentioned. Justus Leopold Westerberg, a stupid-looking Swede, had applied at a shipping office in Boston for a berth on a sailing vessel. The clerk in the office finding the name difficult to write had put it down as Charles Brown, and Charles Brown shipped on the Herbert Fuller as able seaman. He was a man of taciturn manner, surly and ill-tempered, holding himself aloof from the rest of the crew during most of the time, yet occasionally bursting into unexpected conviviality. Of his past, too, you will read more anon.

The remaining character who must be mentioned was August W. Blamberg, the second mate, a kind-hearted, inoffensive man, who played but a silent, tragic part in the story of the brigantine. Of him little is known save that he was an experienced sailor, kind to the crew and innocent of animosity or resentment against a living soul.

With such men as these and a handful of ordinary sailors, whose names it is not necessary to mention here, the Herbert Fuller sailed out of Boston harbor on the afternoon of July 3. In Nantasket roads, which lead out into the ocean, the vessel encountered a heavy fog and was compelled to lie at anchor until 4 o'clock the following morning. The fog then rose and a light wind sprang up. All sails were set and in a few minutes the Herbert Fuller was rising and falling on the ocean swell.

Monks, the invalid passenger, spent most of his time lounging on the roof of the cabin, under the canvas awning that was stretched there. In the evening he remained in the cabin chatting with the captain and his wife, both of whom had taken a great liking to the young man.

Upon the first mate devolved most of the routine work of the ship, and as a consequence he found little time to devote to cabin society. Besides, for some reason or other, he did not like the passenger.

The first ten days of the Herbert Fuller's voyage were uneventful. Cleaning ship, changing watches, striking the hour of day and escaping the heat of the sun comprised the daily labors of the souls on board. The men took turns at the wheel—two hours each, as is the custom on shipboard, and every man had his share of it.

II.

Such was the monotonous state of affairs that existed on board the barkentine from the day of sailing until the night of July 13, and delve as you will into the memory of the crew or the log or the circumstances of those ten days you will find nothing to vary it. This 13th day of July, like the preceding days, dawned calm and hot and humid. There was hardly a breath stirring and the vessel barely crept along her course. The men went about their dreary duties as usual, and throughout the day nothing occurred to indicate that this day was to differ in any respect from those that had preceded it.

At midnight the watch was relieved. The second mate, fatigued after his vigil, went below and aroused Bram, who was to take the next trick. When Bram reached the deck he found the second mate standing opposite the companionway. Blamberg offered him a drink of whiskey.

"Where did you get it?" asked Bram.

"The passenger gave it to me," was the reply. The second mate poured the remaining contents of a small flask into a tin cup and passed the cup to Bram, who drained it. Then the mate threw the flask and the cup overboard and went below. Bram saw that Charles Brown, the Swede, was at the wheel and that all was well, and for the next hour he walked up and down the deck, smoking. Then he went below for a bite to eat, returning, however, in a few moments to resume his watch. He and the steersman were the only men on deck in the after part of the ship. The lookout, forward, was hidden in the darkness.

Monks had retired early that night and had instantly fallen into a profound slumber. He had grown accustomed to the routine of ship life and the changes of the watch failed to arouse him. He did not hear the second mate coming below that night, nor did he hear Bram mount the companionway at midnight to take his turn at the watch. But two hours later he heard a sound that awakened him instantly and sent the blood rushing tumultuously through his veins. It was a woman's scream. He raised himself upon his elbow and listened intently. The scream was repeated, faintly, and then all was still. In a tremor of alarm the young man shouted for the captain.

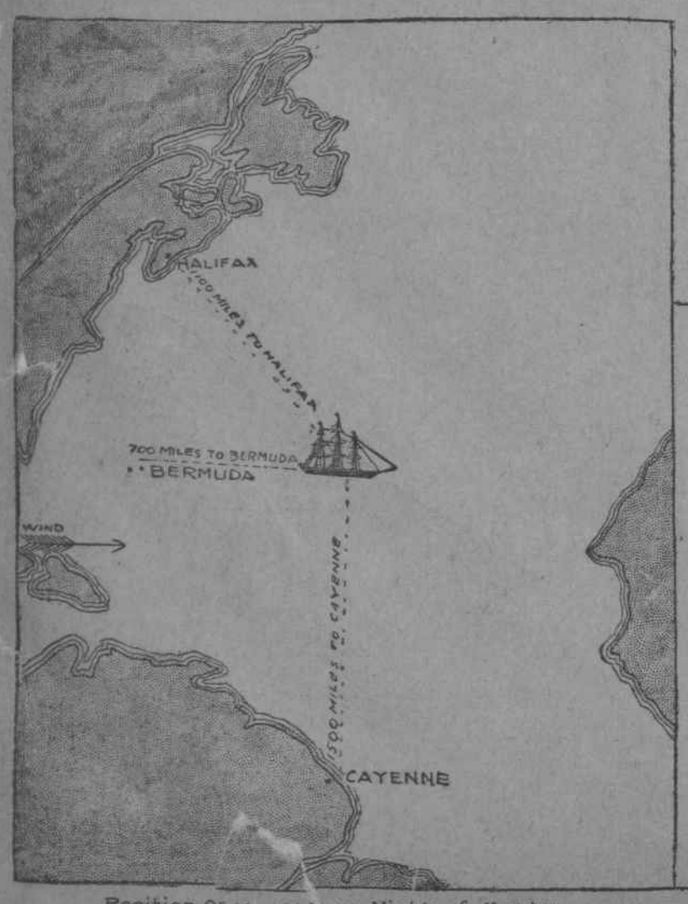
"Captain Nash!" he cried, "Captain!"

All was still. Monks sprang from his berth, partially dressed himself and took from a drawer a revolver and a box of cartridges. Hastily filling the chambers of the weapon he made his way to the chart room. The cot upon which the captain had slept was overturned. The captain was lying upon the floor. Monks placed a hand upon his shoulder and called:

"Captain Nash!"

For answer there came a low, gurgling sound. Sickened with fear, the young man approached Mrs. Nash's cabin, and rapped upon the door. Receiving no answer he entered and peered into the woman's bunk. She was not there, but as he raised his eyes to look for her they met a sight that caused him to recoil with horror. The top and sides of the bunk were splashed with blood—the very roof was covered with blood spots.

Monks fled from the scene and sprang



Position of the Ship on Night of Murder.

Monks Explains His Theory.

The Axe.

Lester Hawthorne Monks.

Bram's Eye.